

Tea Cultural Commodification in Sustainable Tourism: Perspectives from Thai and Japanese Farmer Exchange

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Abstract

Small industrial tea communities in Japan and Thailand have been encountering the decline of the traditional tea consumption demand in new generations. Green tourism and community-based tourism which are forms of sustainable tourism have been raised the important application into the declined tea producing villages to change tea culture as tourism products. This study, therefore, aims to conceptualize ideas of commodifying the tea culture in sustainable tourism for revitalizing small enterprise tea communities in Japan and Thailand. Cases are Japan's Yamato tea growing area in Tawara district of Nara Prefecture and Huey Nam Guen, the Miang tea producing village in Thailand's Chiang Rai Province. The study conducted by the tea farmer exchange project in 2017 using participant observation during the two-day exchange program in Tawara and a one-day focus group of Thai farmers after the exchange program in Huey Nam Guen. At Tawara, eight tea farmers of Japan and Thailand (four of eight farmers were Thai) exchanged knowledge on growing organic tea and other crops, brewing Japanese and Thai tea, cooking and having tea cuisine, and managing tourism by farmers. At Huey Nam Guen, Thai farmers shared learning experiences from Tawara to community members regarding ideas on tea and tourism development. Results from the participant observation and the focus group discussion founded four aspects of tea cultural commodification in sustainable tourism. 1) The creation of tea cuisine serving in farmer restaurants or homestays, 2) developing the tea trail for learning tea culture, 3) gentrifying the abandoned farmhouse and tea factory to be served as accommodations or tea museums, and 4) building a community farm shop for selling tea and other agricultural commodities. These perspectives conceptualized as an integrated model of tea cultural commodification consisting of green tourism, community-based tourism, health tourism, and heritage tourism.

Key words: commodification, farmer exchange, tea tourism, industrial tea community, tea culture, sustainable development

1. Introduction

After water, tea is the most consumed beverage (Jolliffe 2007; Hicks 2009; and Chang, 2015), by more than 3 billion people around the world. It has been grown and produced in more than 60 counties with 4.52 million hectares and 5.30 million tons in 2015. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the global tea industry has developed rapidly with the increase of tea plantation areas and productions. However, tea growing areas and output of Japan have been gradually decreasing. In 2000, Japanese tea garden area was 50,400 hectares and left 44,800 hectares in 2014, a decrease of 11.1%. Meanwhile, Japan's tea production in 2000 was 89,300 tons, but the quantity amount of tea products in 2014 was 81,277 tons, a decrease of 8.9% (Li and Feng, 2017). Besides, the consumption of tea in Japan has been continuously declining due to the competition from other beverages (Yokota et al, 2005). This phenomenon affects small tea producers such as Yamato tea farmers in Tawara District of Nara. In a case of Tawara, green tourism is considered as a tool to rejuvenate tea industry and economic revitalization.

In Japan, the word "green tourism" is heard more often these days. The concept of green tourism was inspired by urban dwellers in Europe who spend the vacation in rural areas to take a rest and recreation,

soak up the rural idyll, and appreciate rural values. It started introducing to Japan by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries in 1992. However, the concept is different from that of European. Green tourism in Japan focuses on the agricultural experience of urban-rural interaction more than enjoy staying and relaxing. The concept of urban-rural interaction involves not only building the relationship of people living in the city and farmers but also strengthens the network of education and business through transferring people between urban market and rural market (Ohe, 2014).

Similar to northern Thailand like a case of Huey Nam Geun village, Chiang Rai province, where the consumption of the traditional fermented tea called “miang” has been reducing, community-based tourism (CBT) plays the significant role in preserving tea culture and sustaining the tea cultivated communities. The northern provinces of Thailand is the largest tea plantation such as Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Nan, Lampang, Phrae and Mae Hong Son. The total area is more than 15,700 hectares. The *miang* or Assam wild tea (*Camellia sinensis* var. *assamica*) covers 87% and Chinese tea such as Oolong (*Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis*) is for 13% of the area. Because of the introduction of Chinese tea by the remnants of the Kuomintang army arrived from mainland China and settled at Doi Mae Sa Long in Chiang Rai, following the revolution in 1949; it was then that commercial tea production began to develop (Winyayong, 2008) and tea tourism in a form of CBT has been started taking this advantage to recover the decline of native tea consumption like chewing a *miang*.

Thailand’s CBT efforts started expanding in 1998 with the promotion of agritourism and homestay (UNWTO, 2017; Phayakvichien, 2007). CBT describes a bottom-up approach to tourism planning and development, particularly in the small destination which was promoted by the United Nations to empower communities, remove the notion of charitable support and enhance local education during the 1960s to the 1970s. By the early 2000s, CBT had emerged as a management philosophy, and closely aligned to sustainable tourism. Adopting good practice in CBT contributes to each of the “Three Pillars of Sustainability” delivering social, environment and economic benefits (Asker et al, 2010).

The concept of green tourism and CBT are both forms of sustainable tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) concepts that “sustainable tourism is tourism that leads to the management of all resources in such a way that the economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural, essential ecological process, biological diversity, and contribute to poverty alleviation” (Edgell and Swanson, 2013 p.149). Sustainable tourism, therefore, defines as “tourism that benefits local people with respecting both host and guest, cultural heritage and the environment” Sustainable tourism is becoming popular and will be the mainstream of the “special interest” or the niche market opposing the mass travel. The target group of tourists for sustainable tourism addresses on quality visitors as called “allocentrics,” tourists who prefer seeking to see new places and learn new things about a particular theme like tea culture.

As such important, the commodification of tea culture in sustainable tourism is the notion of promoting and developing tea - related community. This research, therefore, aims to conceptualize ideas of utilizing tea culture for the revitalization of declined tea-growing communities through proposed sustainable tourism approaches from the tea farmer exchange program between Japan’s Tawara community and Thailand’s Huey Nam Guen village. The farmer exchange program underpinning the research project has a purpose of encouraging Thai tea producers of Huey Nam Guen village taking the lesson learned from Japan’s Tawara community to develop their village regarding tea and tourism.

Connecting tea and tourism in research that term “tea tourism” has been rigorously defined and debased first time by Jolliffe’s book entitled “Tea and Tourism: Tourists, Transitions, and Transformations (Sharples, 2008). Jolliffe (2007, P.9) defines tea tourism as “tourism that is motivated by an interest in the history, traditions, and consumption of tea.” As a new niche tourism market (Cheng et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2012; Fernando et al., 2017; Datta, 2018), tea tourism has developed in many countries for years such as China, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, including Thailand, but academic research has neglected behind tea tourism development (Cheng et al., 2012). Tourism researches conducted with tea industry are focus on China (Cheng et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2014), India (Goowalla and Neog, 2011; Datta, 2018), Sri Lanka (Fernando et al., 2016; Fernando et al., 2017), and Bangladesh (Sultana and Khan, 2018) with

quantitative surveys and qualitative analysis on problems, development strategies, future perspectives, and trends of tea tourism.

However, publications on tea tourism in Japan and Thailand are somewhat limited in numbers, and research issues are a blur and questionable in tourism development. The research article by Kajima et al. (2017) is only one issue found the linkage of Japanese tea with tourism as a luxury product so far. Also, few publications on tea tourism in Thailand slightly based on only a part of tourist activity underpinning community-based ecotourism such as a case of Mae Kampong village in Chiang Mai (Khaokhrueamuang, 2014). Lacking interest and awareness of the importance of utilizing tea culture to strengthen the declined traditional tea community both in Japan and Thailand is the same problem on branding and imaging such of tea growing village as a destination of tea tourism. This study, therefore, a new concept of using tea culture as a tourism product to develop the industrial tea communities in Japan and Thailand through sustainable tourism approaches. It is a unique idea conducting the tea farmer exchange project as a part of Participatory Action Research (PAR) to conceptualize the ground theory on tea tourism which significantly contributes to both case studies and other global tea community areas. This paper is expected to fulfill a gap of shortcoming available source for further study on tea and tourism in Japan and Thailand.

2. Literature Review

As mentioned that tea tourism is a specific niche market for tourists who are interested in history, tradition and culture, and consumption of tea. The review sources of changing tea culture to be a tourist commodity regards with the background of the widespread of tea culture worldwide, and elements of tea culture in the commodification process as a conceptual framework for constructing a development model.

2.1 Global Tea Culture

Tea has been consumed long before the Christian era (Gascoyne et al., 2014). Most scholars believe that China's southwest region, particularly Yunnan province, is the origin of tea tree (Gascoyne et al., 2014; Chang, 2015). According to the Chinese legend without written chronicle to prove, tea was first discovered by Emperor Shen Nung (2737-2697 BC) (Jolliffe, 2007) by incidentally. He was sitting under a tree, while his servant boiled some drinking water. Dried leaves from the tree fell into the pot which created the first tea infusion. However, there is the oldest record showing the utilization of tea as a tribute to emperors during Zhou Dynasty (1100-771 BC), which indicates that there were tea plantations in China as early as 1100 BC (Leung Kin Han, 2009). This evidence is in line with the same period of the oldest wild tea found in Yunnan. Other documents suggesting that tea leaves were already used in cuisine, medicinal and religious purpose around 547-490 BC. Tea drinking was a popular hobby of the social elite until the Jin Dynasty (265-420 AD). In this period, tea was commercialized and gradually became a custom or ritual. Then, tea was further to Tibet around the 7th century, and Korea about two centuries later. Widespread of tea culture in China and neighboring countries also resulted from Buddhism as an official drink in ceremonies and praise to Buddha. In the early 9th century, tea journeyed with Buddhism from China to Japan. It was around 805 AD, when a Japanese priest named Eichu brought tea seeds to Japan and became the custom persisted in Japanese temples. Until the early 11th century, tea was reintroduced by Zen priests with more species of tea, including powder green tea, which was the mainstream of Japanese tea (Matcha and Tencha). Later, Chanoyu, the Japanese tea ceremony emerged in the 15th century.

Besides the Buddhist religion, the international trade made the significance of tea travel worldwide. China started to develop foreign trade during the Zhou Dynasty (1100-771 BC) by the exploration of the silk trade route, the tea and horse trade route, and the sea route to the Gulf of Persia. Together with silk and pottery, tea was disseminated to central Asia and the Arab countries during the time that Buddhism arrived in China. But a major tea-trade activity was the tea-horse trade which began in about 756 AD at the western boundary of China. The ancient tea-horse trading route is also sometimes referred to as "the Southern Silk Road" with more than 10,000 km long. The route in China included two major trails. The first one departed from Sichuan province, and another was from Yunnan province but merged together on the Tibetan plateau before leading to Lhasa, onward to Nepal and India, then reach the Middle East and the Red Sea coast of Egypt in northern Africa. As a result, the tea-trade territory has expanded to cover the whole part of

Southeast Asia from the south of Yunnan, South Asia from India, North and Central Asia, and Africa. Chinese tea arrived in Africa in 1433 before transplanting to Europe and America.

In the 17th century, while *Sencha* became consumption widely by the Japanese public and tea culture was civilized in Japan, tea was introduced to Europe by the Portuguese and Dutch. Portuguese living in the East such as Ayutthaya, the former capital city of Thailand, were tea traders as well as Dutch. In 1610, Dutch brought back green tea from Japan and started to import tea from Indonesia to Europe. Tea became a fashionable drink among the Portuguese, Dutch, and their spread to countries in Western Europe, particularly England. Tea appeared in Great Britain in the English document in 1658, but it was mentioned for the first time in an English translation of Dutch navigator, in which tea was referred as “Chaa” in 1597.

In the 18th century, tea became the most popular beverage of British which created the unique tea culture known as “Afternoon Tea.” Tea was also introduced in the USA. The first tea was sold publicly in Massachusetts and later developed as the American tea culture “Tea Dance” for the tea party. These cultures affected the mass demand for tea and a substantial trade deficit. The British and Portuguese exported opium to China in exchange for tea which caused the “Opium War.” China stopped shipping tea to England. The British merchants, therefore, grown and produced tea in other parts of the British Empire. In 1850s commercial plantations were established in Darjeeling and other areas in north India, including Sri Lanka in the 1870s. Despite the end of the colonial era, the tea industry in India and Sri Lanka still plays the significant to the economy.

In the late 18th century, tea was promoted to be grown in Africa, particularly in Kenya after the failure of coffee to supply the demand in global tea consumption which was also adapted to the culture of Islamic society. Tea became Islam’s official drink as a substitute for wine since the wine drinking is prohibited by the Islamic religion. The growth of black tea consumption made the Assam tea market boom for westerners and Arabians, and tea industry was developed with new technology since then. For example, Thomas J. Lipton has established his tea company for packing the Ceylon Tea from Sri Lanka in New Jersey, USA. Thomas Sullivan invented the tea bags for a ready-served tea in 1910.

2.2 Elements of Tea Cultural Commodification in Sustainable Tourism: Conceptual Framework

From Southwest China, where the wild tea originated, tea has spread globally and adapted to different cultures (Jolliffe, 2007; Gascoyne, 2014; Li and Feng, 2017). Tea makes both intangible and tangible culture. The intangible culture is tea customs of the tea consuming countries. For example, a daily life tea drinking of Chinese, Japanese tea ceremony “chanoyu” as a national art treasure, a symbol of wealth and elegance in “afternoon tea” of European, the herbal tea drink in Islamic countries, Malaysian milk tea, horse-milk tea in Tibet, apple tea in Turkey, even the edible pickled tea culture “miang” of northern Thai people. The tangible culture concerns objects related to the serving and consumption of tea such as teaware. It also associates with the material culture of both natural and human-made properties such as tea gardens, historical buildings, and the equipment of tea processing and tea trading. Both intangible and tangible tea culture are usually reproduced as tourism products to facilitate tourist demand. For instance, Japanese tea ceremony is a typical tourist activity in Japan’s cultural attractions, the tea factory hotel gentrified from a former tea factory in Sri Lanka is used as the luxury accommodation.

Considering examples of tea culture as mentioned, the recreated ideas of utilizing customs (intangible culture) or cultural objects (tangible culture) to add values with the same or different functions in tourism commodities is the concept of “commodification.” And because of the tea growing and producing areas are mostly located in the countryside, the commodification of tea culture is based on the concept of “rurality.” The notion of rurality is associated with the characteristics of rural spaces, areas where rural communities exist and rural activities occur (Kikuchi, 2010). Elements of rurality, therefore, consists of rural spaces, rural communities, rural activities, and rural products and facilities. These components are the fundamental elements of tea culture for the commodification process as tourism products. They include tea spaces, tea communities, tea products and services, and tea-related activities (Fig.1).

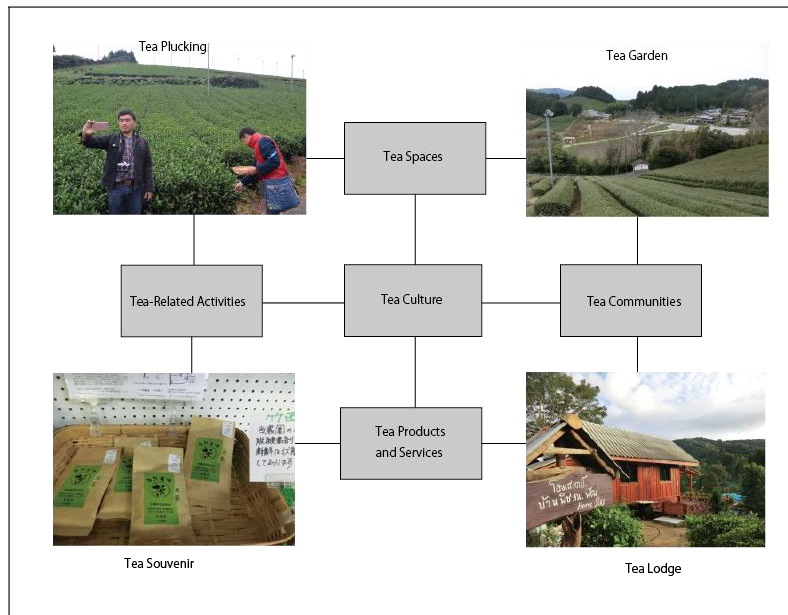


Figure 1: Four elements of tea culture attributing to the commodification in tourism

In figure 1, four elements of tea culture based on rurality emerge as a conceptual framework of tea cultural commodification for recreating a sustainable development model to strengthen the declined small industrial tea communities through sustainable tourism approaches. Tea spaces directly involve with tea plantation areas in which can be commoditized as a place for tea-related tourism activities such as tea plucking, tea festival, and tea folk music performance. Tea communities mean groups of tea producers or farmer households setting in the same environment of tea spaces and living with tea ways of life. Tea communities, therefore, are both tangible and intangible culture regarding the commodification. The tangible culture concerns tea farmers or tea producer's real estate such as farmhouse, tea factory, which can be commoditized as tea lodge, homestay, farm-stay, or Japanese style inns called "minshuku" or "nouka minpakku." The intangible culture represents forms of customs, beliefs, jobs, and lifestyles such as tea making and processing methods, tea cuisine, and tea telling story. Based on tea spaces and tea communities, products and services, and tourism activities related to tea culture are created when the commodification progressed. Examples are forms of tea souvenir, a tea farmer restaurant, and a package tour of tea trails.

Although tea consumption has spread into various cultures through travel from the ancient time, tea is certainly a crucial part of the modern culture which is still evolving. Regarding tourism, tea also tells stories of destinations and reflecting the local identity. However, the relationship between tea and tourism may seem remote and blur. Tea is not yet fully exploited for tourism purposes despite the fact that there is potentially a large consumer market segment (Leung Kin Han, 2007). Tea tourism has been identified as one of niche tourism segments emerged with the concept of sustainable and environmentally friendly management of nature and culture. Tourism has potential to enhance the brand image and marketing of tea producing destinations (Fernando et al., 2016) through the commodification of tea culture.

As mentioned earlier, commoditizing tea culture in sustainable tourism requires four elements: tea spaces, tea communities, tea products and services, and tea-related activities. Tea tourism destinations in the different part of the world are limited in numbers of the perceptions of tourists. The notable examples are tea growing bases in Darjeeling of India, and Nuwara Eliya in Sri Lanka. However, these destinations need to be taken into account with the sustainability to achieve the long-term benefits of tea and tourism. Unbalance of four elements of tea culture may be questionable in the sustainable management which concerns not only tourism income but also social and environmental dimensions.

A case of Sri Lanka's Nuwara Eliya is an example that the uniqueness of tea spaces and tea communities are more attractive and developed than tea products and services and tea-tourism related activities. The study on this case revealed that tea spaces and tea communities have the peaceful atmosphere due to beautiful highland scenery and waterfalls but fewer tourism services such as healthcare and bank, and few events and leisure activities. Most tea-related tourism activities highlight only the heritage tour of visiting the traditional tea factory and tea tasting (Fernando et al., 2016). As such an example, linking the tea culture to tourism underpins the balance of four elements of tea culture. The commodification of tea culture in tourism, therefore, based on the identity of the destinations generated from the history, and unique characteristics of areas and communities.

Taking advantages of the tea history and heritage are prerequisite for creating tea tourism activities and services. This is the application into tea spaces in which the tea-related history embedded with the physical and human geography. Tea spaces are characterized by tea varieties and landscapes. They may be the Chinese tea gardens on the hill slope or the Assam tea plantations on plains under the tree shadows, or in the agro-forests in a case of the wild tea. Tea gardens are suitable for not only sightseeing but also learning the tea varieties, tea breeding, and tea cultivation.

Then is the tea communities which require the way of life-related to tea cultivating and producing since the old days. The tea production methods are a focus for this element as an intangible tourism product inherited from communities. For example, ancient wild teas which are categorized as Assam type are mainly dominated by press tea. They are Yunnan's Pu-erh and black tea. The dark color of the tea is caused by a full fermentation process, whereas the semi-green color "oolong" tea is half fermented. Furthermore, they include a pickled tea in Southeast Asia, such as "Miang" in northern Thailand that takes the harvested tea leaves to steam and press into the tank with water. Green tea produced from the China type has a different producing process by preventing from fermentation. Japanese green tea, for instance, is the world uniqueness of tea producing process with various types of tea products such as *Bancha*, *Sencha*, and *Gyokuro*. The difference between tea manufacturing and productions of each destination makes values of tourism in tea communities.

The commodification of tea culture is a general idea and not new in tourism. However, the success in business regarding tea tourism, and sustainability of such development, particularly in the rural community where tea culture generated, is questionable. The challenge in commoditizing tea culture, therefore, is implementing the appropriate form of tourism with the right target group of tourists. Although tourism helps to revitalize local economies, it also causes problems such as loss of cultural heritage, and ecological degradation. Thinking about the negative impacts of tourism emerge various forms of alternative or sustainable tourism such as ecotourism, green tourism, and community-based tourism (CBT).

3. Methodology

Conceptualizing ideas of the tea cultural commodification in sustainable tourism for sustainable development of small tea producing communities in Japan and Thailand use the participatory action research (PAR). PAR is a process in which some of the people in the community being studied actively participate with the researcher throughout the research process from the initial design to the final presentation of the results and discussion of the action implications (Whyte, 1991, p. 147). The task of PAR is relevant to both research and action but having different objectives. The research conducted by a professional researcher aims to find new knowledge, meanwhile the action of participants leads to find the new solution (Karlsen, 1991) such as guidelines for community development. The research purpose of this study is a focus at creating a conceptual model of tea cultural commodification in tourism as a ground theory deriving from the action process. The aim of action taken by the participants is set for finding the community development guideline for tourism and tea products. The study employs steps in an action process when action and research integrated with shared roles and objectives (Karlsen, 1991). The study took one round of a cyclical process to identify a development guideline for tea and tourism, and a development model of tea commodification in sustainable tourism. The process divided into four stages: plan, action, observation, and reflection (Fig. 2).

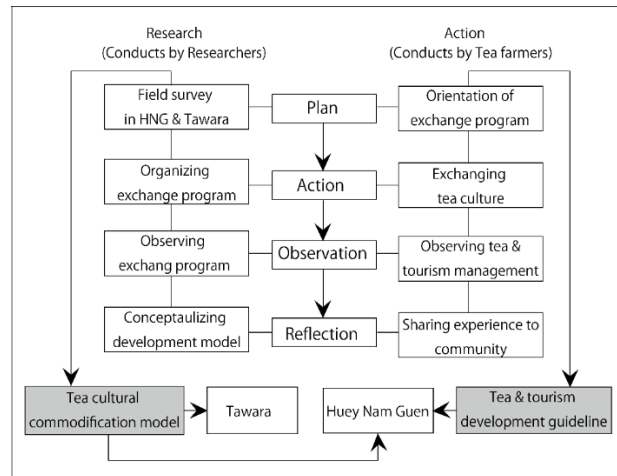


Figure2: Four stages in action process of tea farmer exchange project

At the first stage, field surveys on tea culture and tourism management in the two cases; Huey Nam Guen (HNG) village and Tawara community were taken place by two researchers (authors of this paper). The information derived from the field surveys had been used for planning the farmer exchange program. Then, the representative of tea farmers of both cases were oriented the program. The representatives from HNG comprise one senior tea farmer and three young tea producers. The interactive members of Tawara consisted of four tea farmers. The second stage concerned taking the program for two days at Tawara community between 17 and 18 October 2017. At Tawara, four tea farmers of both cases exchanged knowledge on growing organic tea and other crops, brewing Japanese and Thai tea, cooking and having tea cuisine, and managing tourism by farmers. During these activities, researchers and participants observed tea products and tourism management which was part of stage three. The last stage, tea farmers shared experience of exchange program to community members. At Huey Nam Guen, a focus group of villagers was set to brainstorm a guideline on tea products and tourism development from Tawara's lesson learns on 20 November 2017. At Tawara, a farmer interview was conducted to reflect the feedback and contributions of the exchange program toward the tourism development of the community on 26 November 2017. From the one round of four action step, a model of tea cultural commodification in tourism has been created and proposed in Japan's monthly tea magazine "The Tea 2018" published in Japanese by Chamber of Tea Association of Shizuoka Prefecture during January-December 2018 as a ground theory attributed to this exchange project.

4. Results

According to the involved step of PAR, results of the study conveyed into three sections based on four stages in action process; plan, action and observation, and reflection.

4.1 Planning the Tea Farmer Exchange Program

At the first stage, the surveyed data on tea culture and tourism management model in Tawara community and Huey Nam Guen village were presented with the project's orientation to the representative tea farmers of both cases.

4.1.1 Tea Culture and Green Tourism in Tawara Community

Tawara district in the eastern part of Nara City is one of the Yamato tea growing communities. It is located in the mountainous area with 400-500 m. High from the sea level. The average temperature is 2 - 3 °C lower than the Nara Basin. The foundation of the communities dated back to the Nara period (AD 710 - 794) but the district was merged with the Nara City on September 1, 1945. The present territory covers 32.7 sq km with 18 villages. As of October 2017, the population is 1,750 (male 847, female 903) with 771 households. Of which is 246 farm households.

In March 2006, 12 farm properties have been selected to promote the district as green tourism destination. It is one of the four attractions promoted under the project named “Naramachikado Hakubustukan.” They included the Kei-Kaido road (2003), Tawara (2006), Yagyū (2009), and Naramachi (2010). The project aims to open the people property of the Nara City as a living museum including things like handicrafts, hobby collections, and farm activities. Before starting the project, government officers of the Nara city surveyed tourism resources and interviewed villagers to collect information for promoting tourism. The city published the tourist map guiding the cycling routes and tourist information of farm properties which is updated every year.

As of 2017, 16 enterprises are joining the project divided into three groups. First one is the agritourist farms and agricultural products. They comprise of the tea garden and tea factory, apple garden, blueberry orchard, Shitake mushroom farm, charcoal making, and pickled vegetable shop. The second group is the artisans’ works including the pottery, wickerwork, cloth weaving, wood carving, rice straw handicraft, and stained glass making. Another one is tourism-related services associated with the tea farmer restaurant, marketplace, traditional house, and souvenir and cycling service center.

Along with the properties recommended in the project, tourists can visit the sites, but the reservation is necessary in case of experience agricultural activity requirement due to farming seasons. Tourists who are particularly interested in tea-related learning activity are required to contact tea farmers during the tea harvesting season which is in early May and middle July. Regarding tea tourism, the program offers five activities.

1. Plucking tea buds at the organic tea field of Tawara Natural Farm.
2. Observing how to produce tea at the tea factory “Tawara Shinonome Kyodoseicha Koujyo”
3. Learning history at the “Onoyasuma Ronohaka”, an archeological site in the tea space.
4. Experiencing Japanese tea culture at the “Takenichinoen Yucha-an,” a tea farmer restaurant operated by a tea master, Takenichi. Services offered are having the fusion tea cuisine, brewing Japanese green tea “Senchado,” and playing the tea tasting traditional game.
5. Enjoy shopping the tea products at the community market “Tawara Yamasato Ichiba.”

Furthermore, tourists can participate in the volunteer program of “Hatage Helper” to assist farmer working in the organic farms, particularly in the tea gardens, vegetable plots, and rice fields. Volunteer tourists can bring their grown and harvested agricultural products back home. This project supports the consumption of safety foods produced from free-chemical used farms. Tawara Natural Farms, a rental farmland managing by a group of local farmers and urban people is one of example. This group rent the land of abandoned tea orchard and changed to grow organic seasonal vegetables helping to promote green tourism in Tawara.

4.1.2 Tea Culture and Community-Based Tourism in Huey Nam Guen Village

Huey Nam Guen is the 1,200 meters- highland village, producing fermented tea “miang” for over a hundred year. This small community is located in Vieng Pa Pao District, the southern-most provincial territory of Chiang Rai. The village belongs to the agricultural extension area of the Huey Pong Royal Project. Thus, most of the farming commodities including the Assam tea type is sold for the Royal Project. The Royal Project is helping farmers to manage the adverse consequences of agricultural development, such as the harmful use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers including chemical residue in products (Royal Project Foundation, 2007). As a consequence, the tea growing in the village is guaranteed the quality and safety by the Royal Project’s standards.

In 2014, the Royal Project by the support of the Highland Research and Development Institute has also started encouraging villagers to run agritourist business underpinning the principal management of community-based tourism (CBT). Since then, tea as one of main tourist products has been created the uniqueness for branding and imaging the village as the organic Assam tea-growing community of Thailand. An organic tea group of Huey Nam Guen village makes an effort to re-image the wild tea (*Camelia Sinensis var. Assamica*) used for traditional producing “miang” as a pickled chewing snack to be a drinkable healthy tea.

Five colored tea is created as a method for communicating tourists, branding the different entity of *miang* for the tourist perception, enhancing the value added of wild tea, and building the relationships of tea farmers and tourists. Five colored tea or locally called “cha ha si” comprises white, green, yellow, black, and red. With the local wisdom and a technique of selecting parts of the tea bud, the organic tea here has different colors. White tea is produced from only one tip of wild tea bud, while a second leaf and its tip are selected for the process of green tea. Combining with three tea leaves, one tip and two-second leaves, are used for making the color and taste of yellow tea. And a group of tea leaves that comprises at least four leaves is brought for black tea production. Another is made from Luead Mang Korn (means the dragon blood), a kind of new herb introduced by the Royal project. As an herbal drink which reduces high blood pressure and fat similar to the tea, it is called red tea due to blood color.

The five colored tea has been used in supporting CBT package tour of the village. The package includes homestay, meals, organic five colored tea tasting, and tea souvenir. The program also offers a variety of healthcare and tea experience activities such as a traditional massage, cooking and having organic tea cuisine, picking the wild tea leaves, roasting and kneading tea by hands, walking in the organic tea garden, and trekking in the wild tea forest.

4.1.3 Orienting the Tea Farmers

During surveying the tea culture and tourism management, tea farmers of both cases were informed and invited to participate in the exchange program. The representative tea farmers in Tawara was directory contacted and selected by researchers in April 2017. They were four tea farmers participating in the green tourism project of Naramachikado Hakubustukan. First was Ms. Fugui Sawa, a group leader of Tawara Natural Farm growing the organic tea and the vegetable. The second was Ms. Takenichi, a tea master and owner of the farmer restaurant “Takenichinoen.” The third one was Mr. Hiromu Kubota, a farmer who developed his tea field to grow the organic apple. The one was Mr. Kiyoshi Miyanaka, a tea farmer who cultivate the Shitake mushroom for years long.

The orientation for farmers of Huey Nam Guen was held for an hour by a focus group with 20 participants at the village during the survey on May 2017. Eventually, four representatives from Huey Nam Guen were selected by the community leaders and the application of farmers a month later. The research project fund granted two farmers, Mr. Eaksiam Ngamdee and Mr. Somphong Phienchana, who was chosen by the village leaders. Another two, Mr. Watchara Yawirach and Mr. Prayat Yawirach, applied farmers supported their budgets to attend the program in Japan.

4.2 Organizing the Tea Farmer Exchange Program

The knowledge of Japanese tea brewing and tea cuisine was used in the exchange project of tea farmers in Tawara. Four Thai tea producers of Huey Nam Guen village and one tea researcher, Dr. Piyaporn Chuemchaitrakul, a director of the Tea Institute, Mae Fah Luang University participated in the program organized during 17-18 October 2017. The exchange activities were in line with the definition of green tourism in Japan emphasizing the interaction and transfer of knowledge and experience on agriculture and food between hosts and guests.

The first-day activities started by visiting the Shitake mushroom farm “Genboku Shitake-en Miyanaka” Then , observing the Japanese tea process at the tea factory “Tawara Shinonome Kyodoseicha Koujyo”, and picking fresh tea buds at the organic tea garden of the Tawara Natural Farm. After that, taking the gathered tea buds to create the lunch menu at the farmer restaurant “Takenichinoen Yucha-an.” Thai guests demonstrated how to cook “Yam Bai Maing” or Assam wild tea salad to the Japanese hosts with two styles; the pickled dish and the fresh one.

At the same time, a Japanese host, Ms. Takenichi offered Japanese fusion tea dishes which were creative and unique. Examples were tea-rice steamed with the roasted tea (hojicha) and cereal, fried bean curd with minced shrimp and tea leaves, and roasted tea pudding as tea dessert (Fig.3). The Japanese tea cuisine of this restaurant used seasonal local ingredients such as Shitake mushroom from Genboku Shitake-en Miyanaka and organic vegetables from Tawara Natural Farm. Here, the course for lunch took up to 2 hours without menus. Tourists would be surprised and excited with each dish served at the right time. This serving

style benefits tourists the opportunity to learn and talk to farmers about food made. After lunch, a Japanese host Ms. Fugui Sawa taught how to make a delicious Japanese green tea by brewing the Sencha produced in Tawara. Then, Ms. Takenichi introduced the Japanese tea tasting traditional game to the Thai group. During the tea time, the group of Thai farmers also brewed the Huey Nam Guen's tea products called "five colors of tea."

Furthermore, on the second day, the group of Thai visitors came to Tawara again and continued sightseeing other attractions around tea spaces and communities. They observed the managing system of the community marketplace "Tawara Yamasato Ichiba" for selling tea products and other farming commodities. After that, they rode bicycles to attend the apple picking program at the Kubota farm. Here, they learned how to grow the sweet organic apples alongside the Yamato tea which rare to see in this region. Then, they rode up the hill to visit the archeological site "Onoyasuma Ronohaka" located on the highland of tea plantation area. During the observation, it was found that there have been abandoned tea industrial-related properties. They included tea gardens, traditional old houses, and tea factories. Tourism information in Tawara has been provided only in Japanese such as the tourist route map and cycling guidebook. Some interpretation boards were available in multi-language including Thai but lack of the correctness due to the QR Code translation. Another weakness was the neglect of accommodation like farm-stay or homestay. However, there has been a service of rental bicycle and bike lanes.



Figure 3: The creative Japanese tea dishes for the tea farmer exchange program

4.3 Reflexing the Tea Farmer Exchange Program

At the last stage of action process, feedbacks from the implementation of the program reflected the lesson learned from Japan for constructing development guidelines to Huey Nam Guen village. At the same time, a ground theory on tea cultural commodification in sustainable tourism was composed and proposed as a development model for revitalizing the declined industrial tea communities like Tawara and Huey Nam Guen.

4.3.1 Lessons Learned from Tawara

At Huey Nam Guen, project representatives were interviewed to share learning experiences from Tawara to community members regarding ideas on tea and tourism development. The focus group for sharing lessons learned was conducted with nearly 100 participants who were farmers and students. There

were four development issues on tea and tourism obtained from Japan that was on the consideration of being the guidelines.

1. The creation of tea cuisine serving in farmer restaurants or homestays.
2. Developing the tea trail for learning tea culture that linking agriculture to gastronomy.
3. Renovating the traditional farmhouse and tea factory to be served for learning tea culture such as a tea museum.
4. Building a community farm shop for selling tea products and other agricultural commodities.

4.3.2 Conceptualizing a Development Model

Besides the development guidelines, all stages of action process emerged the notion on forms of sustainable tourism and approaches found in the case studies. The first was green tourism in Tawara highlighted the concept of urban-rural interaction. The second was a focus on Community-Based Tourism (CBT) with approaches on branding and imaging the tea products, and constructing the place identity as found in the five colored tea of Huey Nam Guen. Both green tourism and CBT overlapped the tourism phenomenon in health and wellbeing concerns on safety food products such as organic tea which occurred in the cases. The organic tea and vegetables in Tawara have been used for making a value added of the interaction leaning activities between hosts and guests in a form of green tourism. Meanwhile, the organic wild tea product made from the *miang* in Huey Nam Guen was used for re-imaging the tea community underpinning CBT. As such health tourism involved with the development model as the third element.

Last was the heritage tourism which was an effort to preserve the tradition and culture of Japanese tea through green tourism in Tawara and Miang tea in Huey Nam Guen. Furthermore, there has been a trend in the gentrification of tea-related properties and food to supply tea tourism. The gentrification concept which defines the replacement of tea estates as the urban playground for tourists such as tea gardens for tea picking activity and an old tea farmhouse as a farm inn, therefore, introduced as one of sustainable tourism approach of heritage tourism. As same as the example of food gentrification which turns tea leaves as ingredients in the modern creative tea cuisine is another strategy of heritage tourism approach emerged from the case of Tawara. These forms of sustainable tourism and relevant approaches could lead to the connection with four elements of tea cultural commodification as a development model shown in figure 4.

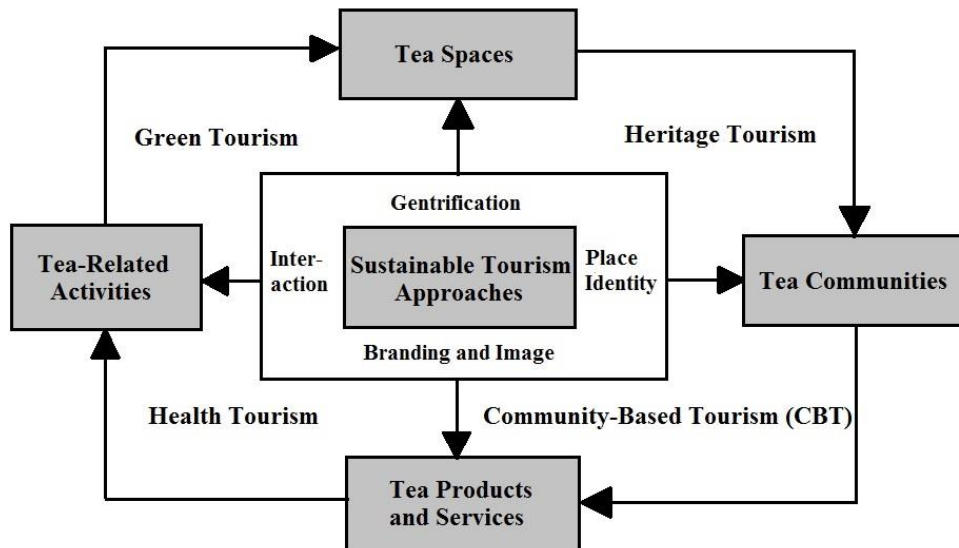


Figure 4: A development model of tea cultural commodification in sustainable tourism

5. Discussion

Changing tea culture to be a tourism product defined as the tea cultural commodification is a general concept but it is a distinctive ground theory in which the way of its application model contributes to rejuvenate the declined of tea industry and revitalize economy through sustainable tourism approaches. Applying a development model of tea cultural commodification to the cases, therefore, challenges to be discussed the sustainability. The model provides support for the United Nation's 5Ps of sustainable development associated people, peace, partnership, planet, and prosperity (Monshausen, 2016).

The first P and second P which refer to People and Peace attributed to the commodification of tea culture in green tourism which integrates the use of tea plantation as the space for tea learning activity like helping farmers plucking tea. The tea cultural interchange between inbound visitors and tea farmers underpinning the concept of green tourism, therefore, build peace through the understanding of the different culture of people.

The promotion of intercultural learning through the tea issue can be strengthened by building the capacity of tea farmers as the tourism business partnership within the management concept of community-based tourism (CBT). CBT stimulates rural community to create the place identity which is one of the key successes of tea enterprises. CBT which encourages the distribution of tourism income and benefits to all community members reasonably can lead to sustaining the tourism and tea industrial community. This notion links to the third P as the Partnership. This argument was supported from the findings on success factors and sustainability of social enterprises in Thailand's CBT that resulted from leadership, authenticity and identity, and stakeholder participation (Sommit and Sitikarn, 2018).

The fourth P is analogous to the Planet due to the contribution of the relationship of the sustainable tourism approach of health tourism and heritage tourism. Branding the industrial tea community by promoting the health benefit of tea through health tourism is compatible with heritage tourism in term of taking a good image of the natural tea grown with the traditional farming method. This approach can leverage the value of tea culture as a luxury tea product which reflects the unique characteristics of the area (Kajima et al., 2017). The overlap of these forms of tourism is in line with the policy of environmental conservation and contribution to saving the planet.

With the integration of four forms of sustainable tourism and their different approaches, challenges in achieving Prosperity, the last element of 5Ps. The ultimate aim of revitalizing the industrial tea community is a focus on social and economic benefits for local people. This goal means sustaining the prosperity by the eradication of poverty and hunger including the promotion of health and well-being and decent work which lies at the heart of the SDGs. Designing tourism development programs based on sustainable tourism approaches, therefore, is a big challenge for that of prosperity issues.

6. Conclusion

The commodification of tea culture in this study is a focus on forms of sustainable tourism and approaches emerged from the tea farmer exchange program in Japan. There are four types of sustainable tourism offer as lessons learned from case studies; green tourism, community-based tourism (CBT), health tourism, and heritage tourism. Each sustainable tourism category in the case study demonstrates the adaptation of related – tourism concept used as the developing approach. They comprise the concept of “urban-rural interaction” in green tourism, the “place identity” for CBT, creating “brand and image” of health tourism, and the notion of “gentrification” applying with heritage tourism. Sustainable tourism development is an alternative approach to strengthen the declined tea industrial communities in Japan and Thailand which is complex and susceptible to failure because of poor design and unbalance of commercializing elements of tea culture. Two case studies that demonstrate ideas and strategies of adding the value of tea culture through the proposed forms of sustainable tourism mentioned in this paper are expected to be as such perspectives from the tea farmer exchange program in designing the useful tourism model to achieve the sustainability of development.

7. Suggestion

Perspectives from Thai and Japanese farmer exchange which were conceptualized as an integrated model of tea cultural commodification in sustainable tourism should be taken into account implementing the approaches in both case studies and other declined industrial tea communities. Further researches should address on the implication of the model through steps of PAR to both evaluate the model and its impact.

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